

Where is arthritis? Findings

The **Where is Arthritis?** provincial tour leveraged National Arthritis Month in September to raise awareness of the prevalence, impact and care of arthritis across British Columbia.

During the tour, **Where is Arthritis?** provided free arthritis screenings and workshops to educate the public and support British Columbians living with arthritis in eight communities: Vancouver, Prince George, Vernon, Kelowna, Kamloops, Abbotsford, Surrey, Saanich and Victoria.

The tour launched at Vancouver's False Creek Community Centre, to a packed audience of arthritis community members, health care professionals and the public. The Honourable Mary McNeil, Minister of State for the Olympics and ActNow BC spoke to the crowd about the importance of healthy living strategies and physical activity as a key prevention and management strategy for people with arthritis. It was an auspicious and solid start to an ambitious tour.

Debunking Myths/Changing Perceptions

Public awareness in BC about the prevalence and severity of arthritis and related diseases is very low. The **Where is Arthritis?** tour was designed to debunk the myths about arthritis and highlight the significant social and economic impact of disease on British Columbians and our health care system. Through targeted media outreach and grassroots communication, **Where is Arthritis?** effectively raised public awareness about the more than 100 different types of arthritis and the cost burden it imposes on healthcare expenses and lost work days.

The tour communications incorporated meaningful testimony from British Columbians living with arthritis, to challenge the commonly held perceptions of arthritis as an "older" person's diseases. The **Where is Arthritis?** video (available on the tour website at www.wherisarthritism.org) reached out to people and brought to life how people with arthritis cope in their daily lives with this debilitating disease.

60 per cent of the 600,000 British Columbians with arthritis are under age 65

Prevalence and prevention

On tour, we highlighted the need for better education of health care professionals and the public for early diagnosis and treatment of arthritis. We also identified how people can have a better quality of life by practicing healthy behaviours and effective self-management strategies for their arthritis. In different areas of the province, we sought to call attention to specific concerns from the community. For example,

In Vernon, we spoke about the higher incidence of arthritis in First Nations communities, and how aboriginals are also more likely to be disabled by their disease. The Okanagan Indian Band welcomed us for a lively workshop about arthritis and how they could access better treatment and self-management programs,

Arthritis disables two to three times more workers than all other chronic conditions. To reinforce the work disability issue, the tour visited the Vancouver Island Technology Park in Saanich to offer a screening workshop and answer questions about how people can continue to work and maintain their quality of life by accessing early diagnosis and effective treatment to maintain their quality of life,

Few people are aware arthritis can affect people of all ages. In Vancouver, we highlighted the impact of arthritis on children, which attacks 1 in 1000 children. At the event, pediatric rheumatologist Dr. Houghton, a leading pediatric rheumatologist, conducted screenings for children and families attending the tour launch.

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What we heard

The response to the tour was overwhelmingly positive, from the general public, community members, people with arthritis and health care professionals. With a dedicated team of advocates, arthritis specialists and research clinicians, the **Where is Arthritis?** tour consulted nearly 1000 people who attended the special events, arthritis screenings and the public workshops during September.

Key findings from the community workshops

Many of the people attending the tour workshops were looking for information that had not been provided by their family doctor or health clinic. Unfortunately, physicians do not always have access to the best treatment guidelines to successfully help patients manage their disease and continue to be successful in their lives. In many cases, this lack of information delayed proper treatment and cost the person pain, decreased their quality of life and increased the costs of their care. For the people attending our workshops, they reported delays in treatment often lead to pain, increased joint damage, expensive joint replacement surgeries and costly hospitalizations. People attended the workshops to learn about how they could participate in accessing better care by getting educated about information, tools and medication strategies to manage their disease. It is clear that British Columbians living with arthritis need information, support and access to appropriate health care resources to manage their arthritis well.

Key findings from the public screenings

The overwhelming demand for the arthritis detection screening experienced by the tour identified the urgent and pressing need to better equip frontline health care professionals with training on arthritis screening and information about arthritis to provide to their patients.

The arthritis detection method used during the tour was a brief physical exam called the “GALS,” a method for examining someone’s physical health based on the movements relevant to activities of daily living. It was chosen specifically because it is the exam is efficient, easy to perform, and was appropriate to be performed in public. The exam is particularly relevant because it is an example of how screening for arthritis could be easily incorporated into existing medical visits such as yearly physicals.

The GALS (gait, arms, legs, spine) exam is a process for clinical observation of someone’s musculoskeletal system for problems with movement or visual signs of abnormalities.

¼ of the screening attendees who had not been previously diagnosed presented with signs or symptoms indicative of arthritis

Response to the screenings was exceptionally positive. Although detailed health information for the people attending the screening was not gathered due to privacy concerns, but we can say roughly a quarter of the people attending one of the tour arthritis detection screenings presented with signs of undiagnosed arthritis. The reaction from these attendees was often relief – that their suspicions had been validated, and they had information to move forward, to confirm a diagnosis from their doctor and work on slowing or stopping the progression of their symptoms and pain.

The majority of people attending the free screenings had been previously diagnosed with arthritis. They attended the screening, in many cases, because they believed there were signs or symptoms of their disease that were not being effectively treated, and could benefit from further consultation. Without the most effective treatment plan in place, with arthritis have had chronic pain, loss of mobility and in some cases, joint replacement surgeries or more expensive medications. Better trained family doctors and more informed patients can take action to self-manage their arthritis earlier and

More than 80% of people who undergo hip or knee replacement surgery have arthritis.

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improve their quality of life, stop irreversible damage and reduce the burden of avoidable surgeries on our health system.

Key findings of the tour

Clearly, by attending the tour stops and getting informed about arthritis, British Columbians are willing to take the steps necessary to be a partner in managing and treating their disease. By visiting people in their communities and talking about people's experiences, the **Where is Arthritis?** tour has raised the profile of arthritis in BC, and has identified three key issues across the province, which are:

Front-line health care professionals must have access to education about arthritis, appropriate medication and treatment strategies for effective arthritis disease management.

Early diagnosis is critical to prevent permanent and crippling damage to the body.

Ultimately, promoting healthy behaviours and ensuring access to appropriate treatment, we can substantially reduce the high cost of arthritis to people, our health care system and our economy.

Learn more about the **Where is Arthritis?** tour at our website, www.whereisarthritis.org